

Local Opinions C5

MARYLAND

Making Montgomery safer for pedestrians

Recent articles have touted Montgomery County's goal of creating higher-density neighborhoods around White Flint and the so-called Science City ["Developers look into paying for transitway," Metro, Dec. 18]. But without a comprehensive reworking of roads, sidewalks and pedestrian links, we will end up with redeveloped islands surrounded by the same poorly planned road network.

As a resident of the White Flint area who tries to walk as much as possible, the current reality is pretty depressing, and it is not likely to change much, even if certain large parcels are redeveloped. From a pedestrian's perspective, the roads are too wide, traffic moves too quickly and relentlessly, the blocks are too long and many sidewalks are inhospitable and treeless. Why would I want to spend upward of \$500,000 (what many family-size condos in the neighborhood are going for now) to live in an isolated residential high-rise in an area where I would be uncomfortable taking my baby for a stroll?

The county needs a two-fold approach. First, given that rebuilding the entire road network is unlikely because of a general lack of transportation money, the county should put more effort into something achievable — making the pedestrian experience as pleasant and safe as possible. Sidewalk ramps at intersections are a good start, but what's needed are continued improvements to sidewalks, paths, crosswalks and signage, including walk signals that work automatically without having to push a button.

Second, the county should get serious about enforcing pedestrian safety laws, especially given recent deaths. That means beefing up signage for drivers at crossings, making sure drivers stop at stop signs or before turning right at a red light, using traffic-calming techniques such as raised crosswalks and LED lighting, and, yes, handing out plenty of tickets if necessary.

Only then will drivers start to change their mind-set and recognize pedestrians as equals in our transportation landscape, and pedestrian-oriented individuals and families will be much more likely to inhabit these redeveloping areas.

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